JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE

22

APR 95

PRIEST

VELLUTO

ALBRECHT

# JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

Sal & Jeff

# Ghoulish

Priest
story

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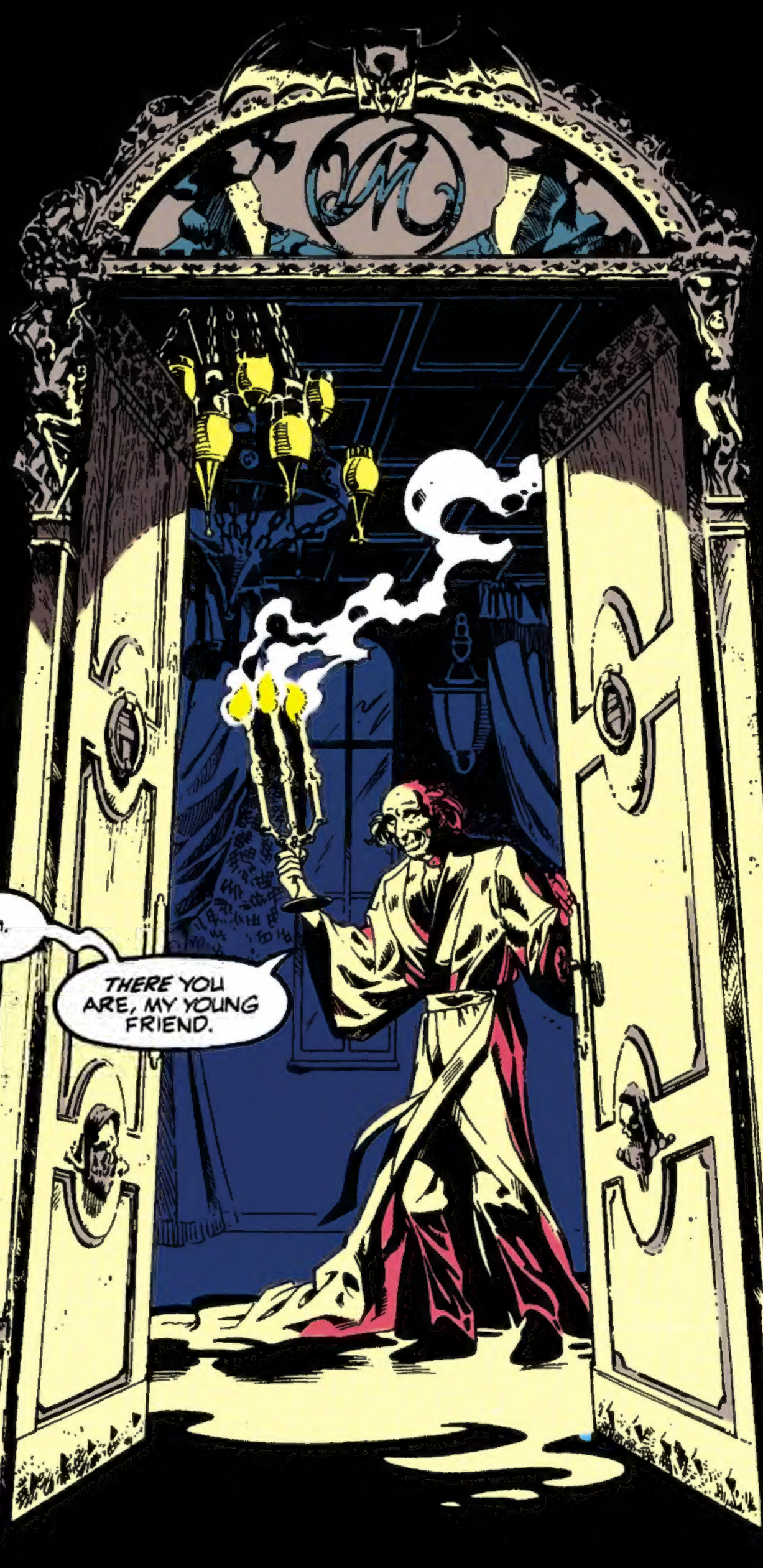


Dearest Cynthia:

It has been only a few hours and yet my heart longs for you. Every moment away from your arms is a torturous, maddening eternity. With every breath I pray for the successful conclusion of my agency business and my speedy return to you.

I will confess much excitement and anticipation that I, Trevor Harkins, bare months out of the university, have been entrusted with so vital a business project. This client, a decidedly curious Baron, has bought certain parcels of land for the purpose of building an orphanage near our home in Paris.

Needless to say, this trip provides me the great opportunity to prove my worth to my superiors and insure my secure future within the firm. Which, in turn, will provide us the financial security we've so desperately sought.

We will have to postpone our wedding not a day longer, beloved. For, once I conclude my day's business here, I will race home to your embrace.

But, first, I must deal with this most eccentric of men, this Baron von Mauler.

My love always,

Montclair, New Jersey
23 February, 1895

YOU WILL FORGIVE ME, WHEN ONE REACHES SO *ANCIENT* AN AGE, *TIME* BECOMES INCREASINGLY MORE *RELEVANT.*

I IMAGINE YOU, IN THE FLOWER OF YOUTH, WOULD HAVE LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF SUCH THINGS.

*Er...uhmm...* NO THANKS...

I MEAN... MAYBE SOME *APPLE JUICE...?*

BUT, I AM BEING *RUDE.*

MAY I OFFER YOU SOMETHING... TO *DRINK...?* SOME... *WINE,* PERHAPS?

I... NEVER *DRINK...*

...APPLE JUICE...

*WEERRDOOOO-!*

*HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!*

MY CHILDREN... THEIR MUSIC *WARMS* THE COOL NIGHT.

...oh, *SNOT...*

WOLVES, THE MAN KEEPS WOLVES.

HEY--

HEY, VON MAULER!!

HOW MANY TIMES I GOTTA TELL YOU-- *ENOUGH* WITH THE FRIGGIN' *WOLVES*!!

I'M CALLIN' THE *COPS*, YOU OLD *BAT*--

WHAAAM!

...HOW...?

YOU WILL... FORGIVE Mr. HENSON.

HE HASN'T BEEN THE SAME SINCE HIS WIFE VANISHED.

TERRIBLE BIT OF BUSINESS... THE WOMAN TAKEN IN THE NIGHT... GONE WITHOUT A TRACE...

WITHOUT EVEN A *DROP* OF BLOOD...

I HAVE A NEW SUBARU LEGACY. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IT?

I...*UHMM*... THAT IS... I GUESS...

...I'M MORE OF A *FORD* MAN MYSELF.

RRRRAAWWLL!

INSOLENT FOOL!!!

:G-GURARKK!:

SUBARUS ARE FINE CARS.

MY FAMILY HAS OWNED SUBARUS FOR *DECADES*.

MINE HAS A FOUR-BOLT MAIN 427 CHEVY, DUAL CARBS BORED .30 OVER, DOSCHER HEADS, A POSI-TRACTION REAR WITH 3.55 GEARS AND HURST SHIFTER.

DUAL 15" BOSTON SUBS WITH GRANITE 6.5's AND A DENON HEAD.

MOON ROOF.

FORGIVE ME, BARON... I SEE I HAVE INSULTED YOU...

NOT AT ALL.

WE WILL SEE THE CAR LATER.

BUT, NOW--

...huh...? HOW...?

--I WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE YOU TO SEND LETTERS TO YOUR OFFICE AND YOUR FAMILY, INFORMING THEM YOU WILL BE REMAINING HERE IN MONTCLAIR--

--FOR *FIVE DAYS.*

I'VE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF DRAFTING THE LETTERS FOR YOU. THEY REQUIRE ONLY YOUR *SIGNATURE.*

VOGUE

F-FIVE DAYS--?

I DON'T THINK I BROUGHT ENOUGH CLEAN UNDERWEAR...

I HAVE AN ACCOUNT AT WAL-MART.

WELL... I GUESS...

...ONLY I'LL PROBABLY BE *BACK* BEFORE THEY *GET* THE LETTERS.

--I'LL TAKE CARE OF *EVERYTHING.*

VOGUE REALTY

NONSENSE, MY BOY--

HOW'D I LET MY-SELF GET IN THIS MESS?

WEEROOT!

WAAAARR-RAAAAAMM!

EVERYBODY MAKE IT--?

IF YOU MEAN, DID EVERYBODY WET THEIR PANTS, TRIUMPH--

--THE ANSWER IS NO COMMENT.

GUESS WE KIND OF TICKED VANDAL SAVAGE OFF, Eh, J'ONN?

SAVAGE IS A POWERFUL AND RUTHLESS FOE, RAY...AND WE EMBARRASSED HIM.

HE WILL GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO AVENGE HIMSELF.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A BIG EGO, MANHUNTER.

INTELLECT AND EGO ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, GYPSY.

AS IF I WERE TALKING TO YOU, DESPERO.

I AM L-RON, GYPSY, A SYNTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS IMPRINTED UPON THE MIND OF--

CHECK. HEARD IT. GOT IT.

BUT AS LONG AS YOU'RE WALKING AROUND WEARING THE *FLESH* OF THE *THING* THAT KILLED MY PARENTS--

CAN IT, YOU TWO! WE'VE GOT *BUSINESS* HERE--

--WITH THE MAN WHO *BLEW UP* OUR HEAD-QUARTERS--

--VANDAL SAVAGE!!

YOU'VE GOT *SOME NERVE*, MISTER--!

TRIUMPH-- *WILL*--

--THIS IS MERELY A *HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION.*

I REMEMBER. I WAS JUST *VENTING.*

I TRUST I'VE MADE MYSELF *CLEAR*, MARTIAN MANHUNTER.

YOUR INTERVENTION BETWEEN MYSELF AND MY *DAUGHTER**-- THAT EMBARRASSING BUSINESS WITH GENE RABUZZO**--

--HAVE EARNED YOU MY ENMITY.

I SHALL MAKE IT MY DRIVING AMBITION TO BE A *WORTHY* FOE.

*ISH* 20 AND **21. AND, HEY, KEEP UP, BUB! --ROO

THE DESTRUCTION OF YOUR HEADQUARTERS HERE ON TASK FORCE ISLAND HAS BEEN A *DOWN PAYMENT.*

BE GRATEFUL I DID NOT DESTROY THE ENTIRE *ISLAND.*

NEXT, ALIEN, I SHALL DESTROY YOUR *CHILDREN.*

WELL, SO MUCH FOR THAT.

NOW, J'ONN... WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THESE *UNIFORMS*--?

MAYBE YOU FORGOT TO SAY *PLEASE*...

IS IT ME, OR IS HE GETTING REALLY *TESTY* THESE DAYS?

J'ONN'S AN *ALIEN*, GYPSY. WHAT WE'RE SEEING IS SIMPLY HIS *HUMAN EMULATION MODE*.

HIS EMOTIONAL MAKEUP HAS TO BE CONSIDERABLY DIFFERENT FROM OURS--

Oh, YOU MEAN, LIKE--

--HE WOULDN'T BE *BUMMED* THAT BEFORE SAVAGE BLEW US UP--

--WE WERE ALL ABOUT TO *QUIT*?

HOW COULD HE KNOW THAT?

BUT HE WOULD NOT INVADE YOUR THOUGHTS CASUALLY OR ARBITRARILY.

J'ONN'S A *TELEPATH*, TRIUMPH-- HE CAN READ *MINDS*.

I AM CERTAIN J'ONN DID NOT SUSPECT YOUR DEFECTION--

--HE MAY HAVE, HOWEVER, *SENSED* IT. HE IS NOT WITHOUT *INTUITION* OR *INSTINCT*... OR *FEELINGS*.

EXCUSE ME? THIS THE GUY WHO *ABANDONED* US INSIDE SAVAGE'S CRYSTAL PALACE?

WHO BARKED ORDERS AT US INSIDE RABUZZO'S COMPOUND?

WHO DRESSED US IN MATCHING SAILOR SUITS?!

I FIGURE, IF HIS WITTLE FEELINGS ARE HURT-- THAT'S *HIS* PROBLEM.

I'M MOVING ON. CHAPTER TWO. LET HIM SULK UNTIL HIS NOSE BLEEDS.

AND THE HELL WITH THESE STUPID COSTUMES!

I DON'T KNOW-- THEY AREN'T SO BAD.

BUT I *WAS* PLANNING TO LEAVE...TO GO DEAL WITH DAD... AND... MOM...*

*THIS STORY TAKES PLACE BETWEEN RAY #0 AND RAY #6-- R'OO, THE CONTINUITY HOUND.

MY BAGS WERE PACKED, I WAS JUST TIRED OF GETTING LOST IN THE SHUFFLE BEHIND *YOU* GUYS.

THIS *ENERGY BATON* DESP--I MEAN, L-RON, BUILT FOR ME MIGHT BALANCE THE SCALES... A LITTLE.

THAT'S IT--REACH FOR A ROPE--ANY-THING TO GRACEFULLY BACKPEDAL AWAY FROM LEAVING...

...AS IF I ACTUALLY HAD SOME-WHERE TO GO...

GOT IT.

FOLLOW ME.

GOT WHAT?

Oh, NO.

THIS IS SO STUPID. THIS IS JUST REALLY NOT GOOD.

SEARCHING J'ONN'S CABIN? ARE YOU *NUTS*?!

HEY, I *LIVE* HERE, GYPSY. THERE'S AN IMPLIED CONSENT.

THIS CABIN IS WHERE J'ONN GOES WHEN HE'S NOT SAVING THE PLANET. THING IS, I'VE BEEN STAYING HERE FOR *WEEKS* NOW--

I FIGURE THIS CABIN WITH ALL ITS *ANDY GRIFFITH* HOMEYNESS, IS A *FRONT*. LEFT HERE TO THROW PEOPLE OFF THE TRAIL.

I'LL BET J'ONN HAS A *SECRET LIFE*. SOMEPLACE HE GOES WHERE HE CAN *REALLY* LET HIS HAIR DOWN.

J'ONN DOESN'T *HAVE* ANY HAIR.

KEEP UP WITH ME, RAY.

I MEAN, J'ONN'S AN *ALIEN*. WHAT'S AN ALIEN DOING WITH A LAZY BOY RECLINER?

THIS BOURGEOISIE 1950's DECOR HAS *GOT* TO BE A SCAM.

FOR ALL WE KNOW, J'ONN LIVES IN THE WOODS...EATS CATS...

FANG?

--SO WHERE HAS *J'ONN* BEEN STAYING?

YOU ACTUALLY KNOW A GUY NAMED *FANG*--?

*HEY!* THAT'S *MY* COMPUTER, FLASHBULB. BUTT *OUT*.

"*FANG*." SOMEBODY ACTUALLY NAMED THIER KID "*FANG*."

IT'S A *HANDLE*, STUPID. Y'KNOW--AN *ON-LINE* SECRET IDENTITY. I DON'T *KNOW* HIS REAL NAME--

--OR *YOURS*, FOR THAT MATTER.

SURE YOU DO. IT'S "*SIR*."

CLIK

KIDS--

--I THINK I'VE FOUND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR. WHO IS--

--BARON ÜMAN VON MAULER?

SAY VON MAULER'S A *LAWYER*-- SPECIALIZING IN *CHILD WELFARE* AND *ADOPTION* LAW.

LOOKS LIKE HE'S TRYING TO BUY LAND-- A LOT OF IT--TO BUILD AN *ORPHANAGE*--

THAT'S NO ORPHANAGE--

--THAT'S OUR *NEW HEADQUARTERS.*

THIS "*VON MAULER*" *HAS* TO BE J'ONN'S *SECRET LIFE.* I'LL BET HE REALIZED HOW VULNERABLE THE ISLAND LOCATION IS, AND PLANNED MONTHS AGO--

WILL-- TWO WORDS--

"--*MORE FIBER.*"

I'M *SERIOUS.*

LOOK, AN HOUR AGO, WE ALL WANTED TO *QUIT.* NOW MAYBE, IF WE BALANCE THE SCALES A BIT--

--BEAT J'ONN AT HIS OWN *GAME*--

--THAT'S PRONOUNCED "*INVADE HIS PRIVACY*--"

--HE'LL *RESPECT* US MORE. MAYBE HE'S SO DOWN ON US BECAUSE WE *HAVEN'T* YET PIECED HIS SECRET TOGETHER. GUYS--

--HE THINKS WE'RE *KIDS.*

GYPSY AND ME ARE *19.* YOU'RE 21--OR 31, DEPENDING ON HOW YOU LOOK AT IT. J'ONN'S WHAT, 200--? 300 YEARS OLD? WILL--

--WE *ARE* KIDS.

I'M IN HELL.

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT--

--SO J'ONN'S REALLY THIS COUNT CHOKULA GUY. AND, RATHER THAN ATTACK VANDAL SAVAGE OR TRY TO FIND OUT WHERE J'ONN'S GONE--

--WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO *DO*--?

RIES

OWZ'S PORK & BEANS 49¢

OWZ'S BROCCOLI 99¢

FOR RENT

PAWN

SELL/TRADE ...NG OF VALUE ...ST IN TOWN

JEFF'S HAIRCUTS

Rub

SALES

Kevin's PRIN... TYPESETTIN...

THIS IS SOOOOO STUPID.

BBB BBB BIG BELLY BURGER

Ann's RICE 29¢

BRIAN'S TOWING (801) 555-HAUL

UTAH JAZZ

CAT DIESEL POWER

Beloved Trevor:

I received your facsimile transmission today. Five days? Is it really necessary to remain in Montclair so long a time? Each day without you is an eternity. An endless journey into a dark abyss.

I spend my time wandering the streets of Paris. Gazing wistfully through fogged glass at curious wares and elegant couture. Without you, even simple shopping no longer satisfies. This longing, I fear, is of a much more primal nature.

Oh, Bitsy says hello.

I do suppose this business with the baron will help secure our future, and speed our wedding plans. But the cold of this winter is perfectly unbearable without you. Hurry home to me.

All my love,
Cynthia Reynolds
Paris, Kentucky
25 February, 1995

TRIUMPH AND HIS DOPEY "MASTER PLANS."

I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S GOT ME INVADING J'ONN'S PRIVACY LIKE THIS. SO WHAT IF HE WANTS TO RUN AROUND CALLING HIMSELF "BARON VON CHOCKULA" OR WHATEVER.

IT'S NOT OUR BUSINESS. IT'S NOT *RIGHT.* IT'S --

--MMMPPFF--!

Oh, MY.

PLEASE FORGIVE MY FOOLISHNESS--

--I WAS NOT WATCHING WHERE I WAS GOING. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MISS-- MISS--?

FORGET IT.

*ALL* OF IT.

LOOK, I'M SORRY IF I WRINKLED YOUR NICE *HAT* AND ALL, BUT I'M REALLY NOT IN THE MOOD TO BE *DROOLED ON.*

I BELIEVE I HAVE BEEN MIS-INTERPRETED.

BET THAT HAPPENS TO YOU A LOT.

EXCUSE ME--

COMICS

"--I'VE GOTTA CATCH A *BUS.*"

THE NERVE OF THAT GUY. KNOCKS ME DOWN, THEN WANTS A *DATE.*

I MEAN, THE GUY LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS HIS *LUNCH.*

Oh, WELL. TRIUMPH SAID J'ONN'S "*VON MAULER*" SHOULD BE ARRIVING ON THIS BUS-- SOME *OLD GUY*--

THERE. GOT TO BE.

WELL, THE HELL WITH TRIUMPH. I'M BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON THE WHOLE DEAL.

J'ONN!

SORRY ABOUT THIS.

I MEAN, I RESPECT YOUR PRIVACY AND EVERYTHING. THIS WHOLE THING WAS WILL'S STUPID IDEA. I JUST CAN'T GO ON WITH IT.

LIKE WE NEED TO PRETEND NOT TO KNOW. Y'KNOW?

HEY, LET'S GET SOME COCOA, WHAT SAY?

*MONTCLAIR...*

THIS... HOUSE... VON MAULER'S COATED ALL THE GLASS TO *BLOCK OUT* SOLAR RAYS... MY LIGHT ENERGY DIDN'T "*RECHARGE.*"

HE MUST HAVE *GASSED* ME WHILE I SLEPT-- DRAGGED ME HERE... TO A ROOM *LINED* WITH *SOLAR CELLS.* THEY'RE CONSTANTLY DRAWING THE SOLAR RADIATION FROM ME.

GOT TO HAND IT TO J'ONN. HE'S THOUGHT OF *EVERYTHING.* ALTHOUGH IT DOES MAKE ME WONDER DID HE BUILD THIS ROOM FOR *THIS* EXERCISE--

--OR DID HE *ALWAYS* HAVE IT READY? LIKE, JUST IN CASE I GO *NUTS* OR SOME THING?

WELL, LOOKS LIKE I'M *OUT* OF THIS GAME. ALL I CAN DO IS WAIT... AND *THINK.* AND *WONDER*--

...WHAT AM I *DOING* HERE? PLAYING *WAR GAMES* WITH THE TASK FORCE?! I'VE GOT TO FIND DAD... SETTLE THINGS BETWEEN US--

--ONCE AND FOR *ALL.*

Y'KNOW... IT'S GETTING A LITTLE *HOT* IN HERE...

PARIS...

MOM'S APPLE PIE

MOM'S

MOM'S APPLE PIE

--SO TRIUMPH FIGURED WE'D COME AND SCREW AROUND WITH YOU A LITTLE-- Y'KNOW--

--HAVE SOME FUN WITH "BARON VON MAULER."

HE GOT DESPERO TO PUT UP SOME KIND OF TELEPATHIC SHIELD, SO YOU COULDN'T *SENSE* US COMING. HE EVEN GOT RAY AND ME TO WRITE STUPID LETTERS, PRETENDING TO BE ENGAGED.

ALL JUST TO SEE THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE.

SO TRIUMPH'S BEEN MONITORING "*THE BARON*"'S MOVES. WE KNEW YOU WERE HEADING THIS WAY, SO I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE RAY'S "*DISTRAUGHT FIANCEE*"--

--AND SEE HOW FAR YOU'D WANT TO PLAY THIS OUT BEFORE YOU FESSED UP--*UHMM*--

--J'ONN--?

--WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR UP THERE?

BACK IN A SEC.

LEXINGTON.

YEAH?

J'ONN JUST PUT HIS HAND UP MY DRESS.

WHAT?!

HOTEL

REGIS

YOU HEARD ME.

I JUST GOT *FELT UP* BY A MARTIAN.

RIDDLE ME *THAT*, BATMAN.

J'ONN MOLESTED GYPSY.

IMPOSSIBLE.

I AGREE. DEDUCTION?

GYPSY-- THAT'S NOT J'ONN.

NO... *REALLY?* YOU *THINK?!*

SO YOU'RE SAYING J'ONN ISN'T THIS VON MAULER GUY--?

NO... I'M SAYING THAT ISN'T VON MAULER. DESPERO THINKS VON MAULER MAY BE TRAVELING IN A *DIFFER-ENT* GUISE--

--THE MARTIAN IS A SHAPE-CHANGER, AFTER ALL.

HE COULD BE ANYBODY--

KERRACK!

FWAMACK

POW!!!

YES.

RRRAAAWWRRL!

THOOOOM!!

MY LOVE--

--I HAVE CROSSED *OCEANS* OF TIME TO FIND YOU.

FWAAACK

MONTCLAIR...

ALL... ALL RIGHT, J'ONN...

...YOU WIN...

...YOU'RE MUCH SMARTER THAN TRIUMPH...

SO... SO HOT IN... HERE...

...NO AIR...

...YEAH...THAT... THAT'S IT...

...SOMEBODY TURNED OFF... THE OXYGEN...

...Ha...ha... REAL FUNNY, WILL.

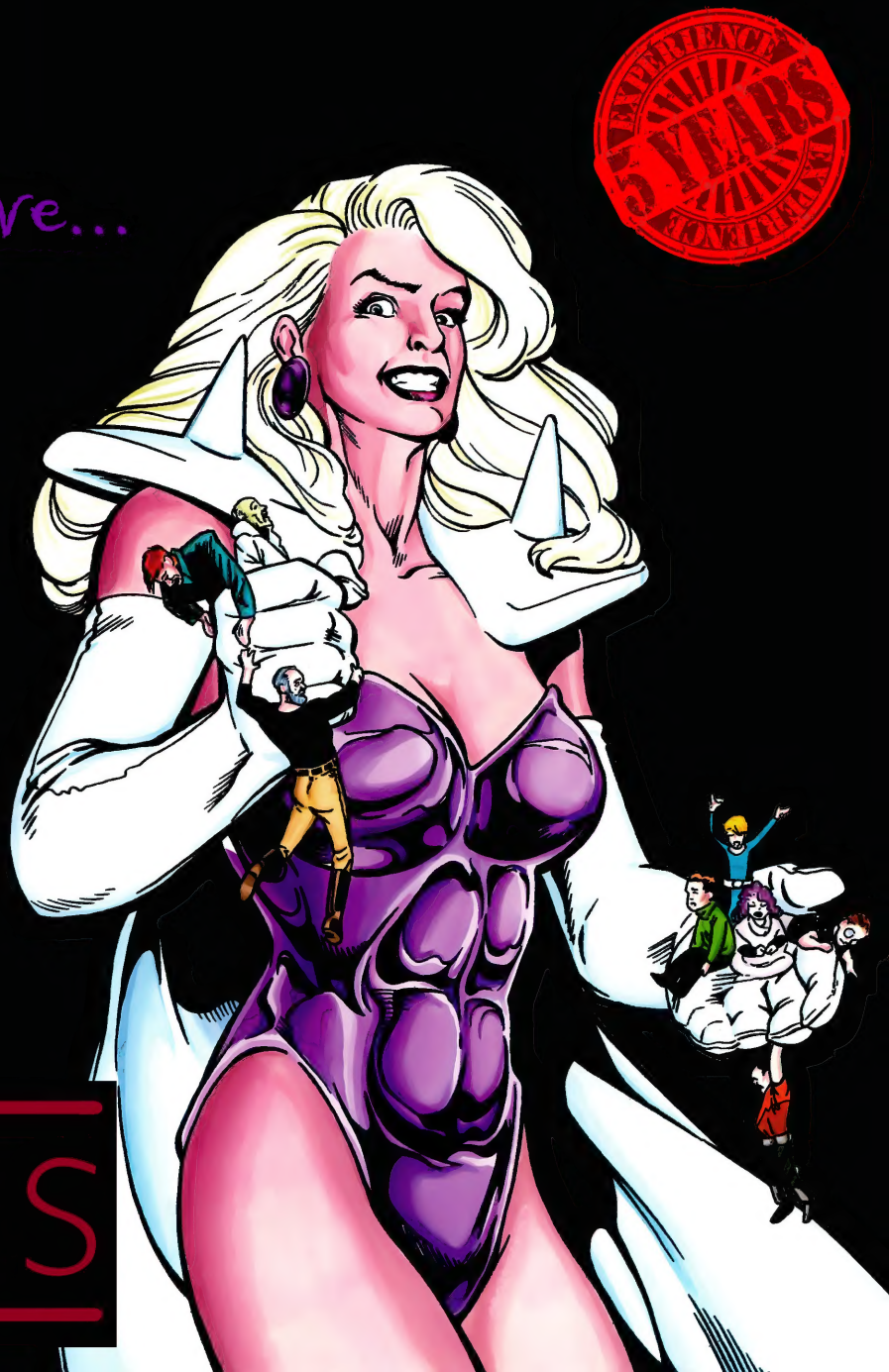
...BARELY... BREATHE...

...Y'KNOW... IF I DIDN'T KNOW... THIS WAS... JUST A GAME...

...I'D SAY I WAS DYING...

NEXT: CHOK II, AND, NO, RAY WON'T DIE, BUT GYPSY DOESN'T HAVE HER OWN BOOK, SO WE'D SHOW UP NEXT MONTH IF WE WERE YOU.

*From Baaldur, with love...*




# GLORITH

# novus